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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the literacy situation in Thailand, where, while literacy is regarded as the basic right of every Thai, the greater proportion of the population reads at the elementary level. The paper first examines the national policy on literacy, focusing on problems which remain to be tackled under the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, and presents strategies to solve the problems of illiteracy. Next, the paper discusses the functional literacy programs (organized to provide illiterate adults and neo-literates with relevant information and problem-solving procedures necessary to lead a happy and productive life). The paper outlines these programs' rationale, purpose, curriculum and material development, teacher preparation, instructional process, follow-up and supervision, instructional evaluation, categories, and outcomes. The paper's final section discusses the national literacy campaign: its objectives, the target group, teaching and learning process, textbooks and supplementary reading materials, problems, and the organizational system. (SR)

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LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN THAILAND

Paper presented at the Thirteenth World Congress on Reading

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by

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LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN THAILAND

Literacy is regarded as a basic right of every Thai.

Mr. Sunanchai, Thai educator, said that the whole picture of the educational distribution background of Thai population at present is shown as follows:

Illiterate or Incomplete Elementary	16.6%
Elementary	70.9%
Secondary	9.3%
College, University	2.3%
Others	0.2%
Unknown	0.6%

The implication of this distribution picture is that the reading level of the greater portion of the Thai population today is at the elemtary level. Only 11% has a higher reading level.

Further implication of this distribution picture is that the producers of books should keep in mind such a fact.

Most books and other reading materials today are not properly designed to serve such average target readers.

For survey of Newspaper Reading according to educational backgrounds:

No Schooling	2.4%
Elemenatry	22.7%
Secondary	6.7%
University	96%
Vocational	83.5%
Teacher Training	92.7%
Vocational Short Course	73.7%
Others	45.1%

It is surprising that more than half of the total households in this country, do not read the newspapers.

National Policy on Literacy

Problems on educational development still remain to be tackled during the Fifth Development Plan, namely :

1. The problem of population growth and educational administration.

The policy of family planning has contributed to a reduction of the rate of population increase.

2. The problem of quality.

It is obvious that in educational development quality does not tally with quantity. The quality or standard of the schools in towns and those in rural areas still differ.

3. The problem of equality.

The economic and social conditions in towns and rural areas are greatly different with the effort that upcountry children have less opportunity to continue beyond compulsory education than those living in towns and cities. Besides, the spread of educational institutions is not suitable for local conditions, and the people are interested in carrying out investment in towns rather than in rural areas.

4. The problem of the irrelevance of educational management to the labour market.

Educational investment for the development of the quality of the population is rather high in cost per student. Such investment is still aimed at rapid quantitative expansion irrespective of quality and the needs of the labour market, as mostly the objective is to produce personnel in response to the needs of government service rather than that of the private section or self-employment. As a result there is a widespread problem of unemployment and underemployment.

5. The problem of the distribution of resources and educational administration.

The government has to bear the burden of investing in education in all respects even though its policy clearly stipulates that individuals, the private sector and local bodies be allowed or invited to share the burden in certain respects. But a lack of measure, methods and procedures to promote such co-operation in terms of investment still prevails in practice.

Educational administration also lacks co-ordination.

Strategies Measures to Solve the Problem of Illitercy

1. Selective intensive programme

This has been done through "Functional Literacy" which is aimed at helping the population to be able to read and write, to know how to think and to work together in groups, as well as being able to apply knowledge in compliance with social conditions, culture and available resources, and also suitable to one's own conditions.

2. Mass campaign

In order to eliminate or reduce illiteracy on a large scale in compliance with the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Ministry of Education has inaugurated a national campaign to solve the problem of illiteracy by encouraging literate individuals to become volunteers in teaching illiterates.

LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Functional literacy programmes

Rationale : The Functional Literacy Programmes is organized for the purpose of providing illiterate adults (aged 14 and above) and neo-literates with relevant information and the problem solving procedures necessary to lead a happy and productive life. The programme has direct relevance to community development works.

Purpose:

1. Promote a wider recognition of problems, and ways to solve them among learners so that they may lead a happy life and become good citizens.

2. Enable learners to seek assistance from agencies responsible for providing services in such areas as vocational skill training, health care, family planning, agriculture.

3. Assist learners to be able to read, write and compute so that they can use these skills to seek new knowledge and information necessary to solve the problems they find in their dayly living, and

4. Stimulate group participation in community activities for self-reliance.

Curriculum and Material Development

The curriculum was constructed using data and information from surveys conducted to determine problems and conditions of the targeted population.

Special curricula were later developed for the southern Muslims, and the northern hill-tribes; both populations having language and cultures different from those of the Thai population.

The curriculum is in four principal parts:

60%-region-based
20%- mainly citizenship skills
20%- locally-based content or emphasis

Teacher preparation

To qualify, a would-be functional literacy teacher has to undergo a seven to ten day training course organized by the Department of Non-Formal Education.

Instructional processes

Instructional procedures of the Programme have as the principal focus the use of group discussions. Classes may be organized in a learner's residence, in a monastery compounded, in a school or other place selected by the learners.

Follow-up and supervision

Provincial Education Officers, Chiefs of Provincial Non-formal Education Centers, and District Education Officers have been charged with the responsibilities of providing follow-up and supervision of the Functional Literacy Programme. These educational authorities are to visit the classes at least once every two months. Village Headmen also oversee the teachers work and help solve difficulties.

A teacher has to submit a monthly report to Provincial Non-formal Education Center via the Village Headmen and District Education Officer. All teachers within a province meet once a year to discuss experiences among themselves and to provide the Provincial Non-Formal Education Center with necessary feedback.

Instructional evaluation

Instructors provide pre-formative, and post-evaluation to determine not only knowledge gained, and attitudes changed but also self-confidence and critical thinking.

Categories of Functional Literacy Programmes

1. Classroom-type instruction

is usually organized in a community where there is a sufficient number of illiterates and where a formal school exists.

Presently, there are approximately 1,000 classes in 65 provinces per year.

2. Volunteer walking teachers

In 1974, the Department of Non-Formal Education started to recruit local people who held at least a grade X diploma and were not less than 20 years old to work as walking teachers.

At present, there are 650 walking teachers operating in 33 provinces

3. Hill-tribe Functional Literacy Programme

The Functional Literacy Programme for the hill-tribe began in 1976. Walking teachers who are both low land Thais and tribesmen, have been trained and sent to the hill villages to teach interested adult basic knowledge relevant to their situations and problems.

There are 108 walking teachers working in hill-tribe villages in eight provinces.

4. Functional Literacy Programmes operated by teachers' colleges.

There are 36 teachers' colleges which offer certificate courses with three months practice teaching for a large number of students. The Department of Teachers Education has agreed to let students teach functional literacy to adults living in the vinicity of schools so that the students will have contact with community which will give them experience that will be beneficial to them later.

At present, eight colleges are operating in this scheme with an estimated 100 classes/year.

5. Programme for military recruits

The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces is engaged in a variety of non-formal education programmes for military recruits who have to serve for two years. The Department of Non-Formal Education, helps train military personnel so they can teach functional literacy for illiterate recruits in their respective camps.

Approximately 1000 soldiers pass functional literacy courses annually.

Programme Outcome

Since the programme was launched in 1971, approximately 205,000 learners have completed the course and been granted a certificate equivalent to Grade IV in the school system.

The researches have discerned a behavioral difference though unmeasurable, among the functional literacy graduates which can effect rural community development as follows:

1. Those who have completed a functional literacy course are noticeably more articulate and able to express their opinion in local meetings than non-learners who are normally passive listeners.

2. Those who have completed a functional literacy course participate actively in the process of planning village development programmes.

3. In the area of daily living and household management, the functional literacy graduates show visible signs of change for the better.

NATIONAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN

According to the policies founded within the aforesaid five-year plan, the Ministry of Education was assigned to undertake the "National Literacy Campaign" aimed at reducing illiteracy rate from 14.5% to 10.5% within 5 years. The campaign was started in 1984.

Objectives:

1. To enable the illiterate to obtain basic literacy skills need for self-improvement.

2. To foster the people's quest for knowledge and understanding through reading, and

3. To provide an opportunity for communities to establish patterns of self-help action which will serve as a basis for further communual participation in national development.

Target Group

All illiterate Thai population who are within 14-50 years of age.

Number of illiterates in the priority target groups identified during 1983-1985

	Total	Male	Female
1. No. of people who did not complete 4 years of education	2,084,692	715,049	1,369,643
2. No. of people who did not complete 4 years of education and are unable to read and write simple Thai	1,739,751	596,520	1,143,231
3. No. of people identified in 2 who are within the ages of 14-50 at the time of the survey	925,332	354,973	570,359
4. No. of people in 3 whom the provincial authorities can locate during the campaign	708,926	_____	_____

Source : Department of Non-Formal Education

Teaching and Learning Process

It was found that 68.79% of volunteer teachers employed one-by-one technique in teaching their clients whilst the rest taught as a groups or a class. Teaching and learning were available at the learners' houses or at teachers' houses.

Textbooks, supplementary reading materials

Two formats of the text books used in teaching-learning process of this project at the moment were provided by the Non-Formal Education Department. Other printed materials were employed on some occasions as complementary text such as primary school textbooks, newspapers and posters.

The Non-Formal Education Department produced teaching materials so called "Textbook of LIteracy Campaign Programme". This text designed to practice step-by-step reading and writing skills from simple to more difficult topic. It started with reading/ writing A, B , C.....and then the lesson will be word writing word reading, sentence reading which link to their occupation such as farming, agriculture, health, and medicine. The students will take a test made by the Non-Formal Education Department at the end of the program. The tests consist of reading and writing tests. If they pass the exam, they receive a certificate.

Problems:

(1) Volunteer teachers don't have much experiences in teaching

(2) The learners tend to be absent because of their hard work. Some aging people could not read because of eye-sight problem.

So, the materials were improved my making it easier to read and providing a lot of illustrations.

For the impact of this problem, we found that about 60% of the Program graduates like to go to the village Reading Center where they can read a lot of newspapers, journals and governmental documents. Some graduates can write letters. They are enthusiastic about reading for information and for improvement of the quality of life.

In 1986, we found that the graduates' reading/writing abilities were improved.

So, we provide some continuing educational programs for them such as :

1. Village Reading Center
2. Portable (Box) Library in every village
3. Village-group called "Kung" for reading materials
4. Group-discussion
5. Book Donation Program
6. Radio-program for reading promotion
7. Local journal written by villagers

Organizational System

The organizational system of the national literacy campaign is as follows: at the provincial level the campaign will be administered through the official rural development structure which is organized through provincial, district, sub-district anbd village development committees. These committees will be responsible for target setting, formulating campaign strategy, mobilizing resource and personnel, follow-up and reporting. To further assist the development committees is carrying out the campaign, working groups composed of representatives from government and private agencies and educational institutions, religious groups and local leaders can be appointed can be appointed village volunteers are the key to the success of the programme. Anyone who is able to read and write fluently is eligible to apply to serve a volunteer regardless of the age, sex, or educational background.

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